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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

More about vitamin D

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Wednesday, February 7, 1934.

How do you do, Everybody:

I've discovered that when you start talking about vitamins on the radio it's rather like following a serial story in the magazines. Each chapter takes you a little deeper into the plot, but the end of each installment leaves you up in the air with your mind full of questions.

Probably that's the way you felt last week at the end of the first chapter on vitamin D and cod-liver oil. About all I could do was to acquaint you with the character of this vitamin. It's the agent, you remember, that helps the body use the calcium in our food to build bones and teeth. Somebody has called the vitamins the spark plugs of the diet. And they really do perform much the same function in our bodies that the spark plugs do in a motor. As we all know from sad experience, the tank of the car may be full of gasoline, but nothing happens unless the spark sets the motor running. And so it is in our bodies. We may be eating foods rich in calcium, but we need the vitamin D "spark" to make that calcium deposit in our bones and teeth where we need it. Those two together make the right combination -- plenty of milk and green vegetables and other calcium-rich foods and plenty of vitamin D, either from food sources or manufactured in our bodies by letting the direct rays of the sun shine on the skin. Sounds like a simple enough rule of diet for anybody to understand, doesn't it? But every now and then somebody brings me up short with a question and shows me that we home economics people haven't told our story half as well as we should.

A young college friend of mine certainly did just that when she was home for her Christmas vacation. She's a senior this year and working almost feverishly to crowd in all she can before she graduates in June. In fact, she's so keen on some of these big economic questions of our times that she forgets to eat her dinner and she forgets to go to bed early. And like many another young person of 20, she's very proud of her slim girlish figure and afraid to eat anything that might make her fat. But she's also very proud of her beautiful straight white teeth. So it was a jolt to her all right when the dentist told her this winter that she was starving her teeth, and that their beauty would be spoiled if she weren't careful. He prescribed a vitamin D concentrate for her. She rushed right off to the drugstore and bought it and took the first dose before she went to bed that night. But what he failed to tell her was that she must drink plenty of milk and eat lots of green leafy vegetables to provide the calcium for the vitamin D to work on. Probably, he took it for granted she'd know that anyway. But she didn't. So we had a long talk about food and nutrition one evening and she went back to college with two food lists in her notebook. One to remind her of the foods rich in vitamin D and the other to show just which foods are rich in calcium.

By the way, if any of you want that list of calcium rich foods, I'll be glad to send it to you. On the back of the same sheet are listed the foods rich in phosphorus, another element we need in our diet. In fact calcium and phosphorus in chemical combination are what give our bones their rigidity. So we

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need to have plenty of both of these elements constantly carried to our bony structure by the blood stream. This is true even for us adults whose bones and teeth are fully formed. Because if the supply of calcium or phosphorus falls much below normal, these elements already deposited in the bones will be drawn on to make up the shortage. Now I don't mean to imply that if our meals are low in calcium and phosphorus for a few days our bones will get soft and we'll collapse. Not at all. Sometimes the effects are not striking. But you remember the old saying that a mother has to sacrifice a tooth for every child she bears. And oftentimes she did, if her diet before and after the birth of the baby did not contain enough calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D.

One more point, Doctor Munsell, our nutrition specialist, believes very strongly that we shouldn't dose ourselves or our children with vitamin D concentrates unless a physician prescribes them. As I said vitamin D is an activator to aid the depositing of calcium in the bones. A growing child needs an abundance of vitamin D. But as we get older and our bones have finished growing, we do not want to overstimulate the depositing of calcium. So just try to get a normal amount of vitamin D from foods, and let it go at that.

Perhaps you'd like me to run through again the list of foods that are good sources of vitamin D. First, comes cod-liver oil. Then next are egg yolk, salmon, oysters, California sardines, butter, and milk, not to mention the foods irradiated by the Steenbock process.

There are other fish oils even more potent than cod-liver oil in vitamin D, and probably more and more of them will come onto the retail market. Maybe you've read about the halibut-liver oil which is sold plain or reinforced with viosterol, the trade name for a product rich in vitamin D. This halibut-liver oil is also many times richer than cod-liver oil in vitamin A. I realize that I still haven't touched the vitamin A part of the cod-liver oil story. So again, I'll have to say continued in our next, and goodbye for this time.